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ABSTRACT

The authentic assessment method of student evaluation is particularly well suited to vocational education. It connects the way schoolwork is assessed with the way knowledge and competence are judged in the workplace by focusing on tasks that are simultaneously meaningful to learners and linked to school and nonschool demands. Portfolios are one example of the authentic assessment method; they provide multiple, tangible forms of evidence of students' accomplishments in a format that is transferable to the job search process. Among the many areas of vocational education in which authentic assessment is suitable are technology, business, automotive, and technical education. Vocational educators developing authentic assessments must ensure that the assessments have the following characteristics: reflect learning theories, promote additional learning, use multiple measures (including kinetic and artistic), recognize that errors are intrinsic to learning, are sufficiently ambitious, and are rated by criteria that are clear and defensible. (An annotated bibliography of 24 print resources about authentic assessment in vocational education is included.) (MN)

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Authentic Assessment in Vocational Education
Trends and Issues Alerts

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

TRENDS AND ISSUES ALERTS

by Sandra Kerka

1995

Authentic Assessment in Vocational Education

Because "vocational educators have long favored practical demonstrations of knowledge and competence" (Little 1992, p. 28), the current emphasis on authentic assessment (AA) meshes well with vocational education. Vocational educators are concerned with preparing students for the expectations of the workplace. Employers want critical thinking, teamwork, self-regulatory skills, adaptability, and flexibility, and they want meaningful evidence of these capacities in potential employees (Borthwick 1995). At the same time, curriculum integration has become a hallmark of educational reform, and vocational educators want to demonstrate that their curricula meet high standards (Little 1992). These needs are met by AA because it connects the way schoolwork is assessed with the way knowledge and competence are judged in the workplace. It focuses on tasks that are meaningful to learners and linked to school and nonschool demands (Mann 1991).

Portfolios are an obvious example of an AA method that provides multiple, tangible forms of evidence of student accomplishment in a format transferable to the job search (Anderton-Lewis and Cooley 1995). Design problems in technology education are another example of authentic learning, as students accomplish complex and significant tasks using prior knowledge and solve real-world problems while reflecting on the learning process (Mahlke 1993). Other examples in business, automotive, and technical education in the resources listed here demonstrate the applicability of AA to vocational education. Educators should ensure that AAs reflect learning theories, promote additional learning, use multiple measures (including kinetic and artistic), recognize errors as intrinsic to learning, are sufficiently ambitious, and are rated by criteria that are clear, high, and defensible (Little 1992; Whichard and Cobb 1993).

Print Resources

Anderton-Lewis, L. M., and Cooley, J. A. "Give Students a Job-Seeking Edge." ***Vocational Education Journal*** 70, no. 1 (January 1995): 15. (EJ 494 292)

A resume portfolio can provide supporting documentation for a resume; contents should be matched to an employer's outlined requirements.

Borthwick, A. "Body of Evidence." ***Vocational Education Journal*** 70, no. 3 (March 1995): 24-26, 48. (EJ 498 567)

Portfolios help students assess their own strengths and weaknesses and provide an authentic means of evaluation. They are also way to teach students to present themselves as a potential employee.

Custer, R. L. ***Performance-Based Education Implementation Handbook.*** Columbia: Instructional Materials Lab, University of Missouri, 1994. (ED 379 459)

Explains the authentic approach to assessment and how it differs from traditional assessment; gives useful advice about rubrics, portfolios, and other performance assessment tools.

Elrod, G. F., and Sorgenfrei, T. B. "Toward an Appropriate Assessment Model for Adolescents Who Are Mildly Handicapped." ***Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*** 11, no. 2 (Fall 1988): 92-98. (EJ 382 137)

Proposes an alternative assessment model for secondary students with mild handicaps that infuses various assessments into the process: career and vocational, psychoeducational, sociobehavioral, and academic.

Fitch, S. ***Outcome Based Alternative Assessment.*** Maine Center for Educational Services, 1993. (ED 362 573)

In a technology communications class, students create a business and associated documents and are evaluated on their innovations, creativity, and ability to use skills that match the needs of the area's actual businesses.

Haber, F. B. "Alternative Assessment in Accounting." ***Business Education Forum*** 48, no. 2 (December 1993): 23-25. (EJ 472 201)

Describes assessment techniques for accounting that relate to relevant business competencies: team testing, group problem solving, and role playing.

Hater, J. J. "Work Keys." Paper presented at the American Psychological Association Convention, Washington, DC, August 14, 1992. (ED 355 380)

Work Keys provide students with a realistic preview of skills needed for jobs and an assessment of their standing on those skills. The skills and abilities measured are validated by workers in the industries.

Hill, C., and Larsen, E. ***Testing and Assessment in Secondary Education.*** Berkeley, CA: National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1992. (ED 353 445)

Internal evaluation and self-monitoring are increasingly critical workplace skills. Authentic assessment should teach students how to monitor their own work in realistic contexts.

Hoepfl, M. "Portfolio Assessment." ***Technology Teacher*** 53, no. 2 (November 1993): 28-29. (EJ 472 057)

Technology teachers can expand the concept of student activity logs to portfolios, in which students are more involved in selecting and evaluating items included Portfolio assessment is an ongoing, investigatory process.

Johnson, S. D. "Authentic Assessment in Technology Teacher Education." ***Journal of Epsilon Pi Tau*** 18, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 8-14. (EJ 462 130)

Assessment is an essential activity conducted by teacher educators to improve teaching and learning. Future teachers can be evaluated through situational tests, portfolio reviews, and performance exams, both cumulative and one-time assessments.

Kerka, S. ***Techniques for Authentic Assessment. Practice Application Brief.*** Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, 1995.

Explains the advantages of authentic assessment; gives adult, career, and vocational education examples; provides implementation advice.

Latting, J. ***Assessment in Education.*** Berkeley, CA: National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1992. (ED 363 360)

Performance assessments should primarily serve instruction, facilitate learning, and be multidimensional, and they should not compare students to each other.

Little, J. W. ***Stretching the Subject: The Subject Organization of High Schools and the Transformation of Work Education.*** Berkeley, CA: National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1992. (ED 359 365)

Because of its problem- or project-oriented curriculum, vocational education has long favored practical demonstrations. Authentic assessment practices are one contribution vocational education can make to educational reform.

Luft, V. D. "High-Performance Education." ***Vocational Education Journal*** 69, no. 4 (April 1994): 28-29. (EJ 480 507)

In Porsche's outcomes-based training model, teachers vary teaching and assessment methods as often as it takes to ensure that students learn a specific task and are able to perform it well.

Mahlke, V. B. "Design Technology in the Elementary School." ***Technology Teacher*** 53, no. 3 (December 1993): 6-7. (EJ 473 851)

The design brief process in technology education begins with authentic situations and enables students to use prior knowledge, research, problem-solving, and other creative thinking skills and observe their learning processes.

Mann, D. "Performance Assessment and Records of Accomplishment for Employability." Paper presented at the Colorado State Department of Education Assessment Conference, Breckenridge, CO, June 15, 1991. (ED 335 415)

Visual documentation through instant photography provides a record of a job seeker's experiences that demonstrates accomplishments to a prospective employer.

Peers, M. G. "A Teacher/Researcher's Experience with Performance-Based Assessment as a Diagnostic Tool." ***Journal of Reading*** 36, no. 7 (April 1993): 544-548. (EJ 460 957)

Vocational students in a composition class devise a solution to a hypothetical problem that is scored on several dimensions.

Rabinowitz, S. "Beyond Testing." ***Vocational Education Journal*** 70, no. 3 (March 1995): 27-29, 52. (EJ 498 568)

The Career-Technical Assessment Program measures vocational program, generic workplace readiness and foundation academic skills against established standards. Cumulative assessments are made of supervised practical experience, student projects, and a portfolio.

Sormunen, C. "Critical Thinking in Business Education." Paper presented at the American Vocational Association Convention, St. Louis, MO, December 1992. (ED 354 380)

Critical thinking can be evaluated through authentic assessment using a four-step process: clarify reasons for the assessment, clarify performance to be evaluated design exercises, and design a performance rating plan.

Sormunen, C. "Portfolios: An Assessment Tool for School-to-Work Transition." ***Business Education Forum*** 48, no. 4 (April 1994): 8-10. (EJ 478 896)

Explains how portfolios were used to prepare students for a job-search unit, to evaluate the development of communication skills, and to determine a plan for the continued development of students' employability skills.

Stemmer, P.; Brown, B.; and Smith, C. "The Employability Skills Portfolio." ***Educational Leadership*** 49, no. 6 (1992): 32-35. (EJ 441 170)

The ESP contains evidence of students' attainment of academic skills, personal management behaviors such as meeting deadlines and working without supervision, and teamwork skills such as listening and compromise. Local businesses are involved in reviewing portfolios.

Whichard, J. A., and Cobb, R. B. "Assessment Alternatives for Students in Vocational Education." (ED 367 885)

Assessment types include portfolios, exhibitions (presentations, oral history projects), dynamic (examiner as interviewer), and curriculum based (e.g., observation and recording of a performance).

Wirt, J. G. ***Performance Assessment Systems.*** Washington, DC: National Governors Association, 1994.

Explains how performance assessment differs from the job competency model and addresses concerns about describing and assessing complex performance, embedding assessment, setting performance-level standards, and ensuring generalizability.

Wolansky, W. "Portfolio Assessment." ***Tech Directions*** 52, no. 3 (October 1992): 23-24. (EJ 451 056)

Gives an example of a portfolio used in a vocational facilities design class.

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